

My name is Denise King, and my husband and I are the custodial grandparents of a 25 year-old young man with intellectual and developmental disabilities because of a brain injury at 7 months of age. He and his siblings have lived with us since he was 8, his sister 7, and his brother 3. My husband is 70 and I will be 70 next year. We have been here before you for 3 years now because our grandson needs a residential placement, and as you know, we still wait. Our loved ones with ID/DD live in the shadows of society through no fault of their own. They are denied the right to live in the community with their peers because of "lack of funds." They are denied the supports they need to hold a job because of "lack of funds." If they are unable to hold a job because of their abilities, they are sometimes denied the right to congregate with their peers because of "lack of funds." Our grandson is lucky enough to have a job in the kitchen of ECSU with help from a job coach. However, his hours were cut this year due to the funding cuts. Grants have been cut respite and summer camp. This effects both our loved ones who again need peer contact, and it effects the caregivers who really need a break from 24/7 care. In the year 2016, it is time to come out of the shadows. Our loved ones in the ID community have the same hopes, dreams, pride in accomplishments, and need for acceptance as the rest of us. They just need supports.

The Department of Developmental Services has been underfunded and mismanaged for years, long before there was a budget crisis. Many people have been waiting for residential placements for 10, 15, or 20 years; our grandson has been on the Wait List for over 10 years. We love our grandson unconditionally, but we are getting older and burned out. It appears that the Department of Developmental Services is being systematically dismantled at the expense of our loved ones. Funding to DDS cannot be cut any further. We need funding for our loved ones to prosper. We need the Wait List to be current, accurate and functional. We need the mismanagement to stop.

We have a glimmer of hope both on the state and federal level that we are being heard. Please stand up for our families who have been asking for help for so long. Please show us that the system does work. Stand up against a political system that values special interests at the expense of what is right. As one self-advocate recently asked, "Where is your courage?"

Denise King

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